

Viral marketing in the music industry: How
independent musicians utilise online peer-to-peer
communications



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Abstract

The aim of this research was to critically examine the use of viral marketing within the music industry. Specifically, how peer to peer communications can be utilised to gain a higher following. This was achieved by researching the uses of peer-to-peer communications through social media, the role of branding in the music industry and how specific audiences can be targeted through online platforms.

Although there has been substantial research into the use of online peer-to-peer communications throughout various industries, there has been limited academic insight into how viral marketing is utilised within the music industry. However, with the use of online peer-to-peer communications becoming increasingly prevalent, it is a critical area for academics to consider. Due to this gap in literature, this research may be regarded as innovative.

To ensure that the full context surrounding the research question was considered, the study was approached from an interpretivist stance and qualitative methods were used. By conducting semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to collect deep and insightful data based on the narrative of each participant.

Although there were key differences throughout the data, there were several themes that were consistent throughout. As social networks are a lucrative platform from utilising a viral marketing strategy, several participants suggested that it is essential for musicians to use a variety of them. The results showed that throughout the music industry it is crucial to develop a strong brand image and remain consistent within this. The research also suggested that consumers who are engaged with a brand are more likely to engage in peer-to-peer communications. As the most likely demographic to engage in peer-to-peer communications, this research suggested that millennials would be the most beneficial group to target a viral marketing strategy towards.

As the sample contained participants from various roles within the music industry, each of whom had different motivations, performed separate styles of music and were at various stages of their career, it could be argued that this research contained too many variables and therefore, lacked depth. However, the aim of this research was to analyse the similarities and differences between a variety of roles within the music industry, therefore, collecting a multitude of data was the intention of the researcher.

During the time of conducting, this research could have been considered innovative, due to not only the gap in literature, but also because of the relevance of the current uses of technology. However, due to the constant evolutions in modern technology, what may have been considered current at the time of research, may not be as relevant in future years. Therefore, similar research may need to be considered in future years.

Declaration

This work is original and has not been submitted previously for any academic purpose. All secondary sources are acknowledged as somebody else's work.

Signed: S. George

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background context

Through the continuous developments in modern technology, the way we consume music has changed dramatically throughout the years. With the evolution of digital music, the need for purchasing physical copies of music has been eradicated.

Although there is software such as iTunes, where you can purchase digital music legally, through online file-sharing and illegal downloading, consumers are able to obtain copies of music for free. Due to the negative impact of illegal file sharing on record sales, Decrop and Derbaix (2014) suggest that musicians' main source of revenue has become live performance.

However, according to research by the IFPI (2016), digital music sales account for 45% of all global music revenue, compared to physical sales which account for only 39%. Therefore, marketers focus has shifted from previous, more traditional methods of marketing, towards various digital marketing techniques.

Through the use of online peer-to-peer communications, content can be received and shared across a wider platform, at a much lower cost. Compared to more traditional marketing techniques, viral marketing is a much faster way of reaching a large audience and propagating a message. Therefore, it is vital for organisations to adopt a viral marketing strategy (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008; Fill, 2009; Harvey, Stewart and Ewing, 2011; Nigam, 2012).

With over 2.6 billion users on social media worldwide, networks such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter have become lucrative platforms for organisations to utilise peer-to-peer communications. Due to the sheer amount of users, organisations can not only share their own content to a mass audience, but there is also the potential for content to go viral (Statista, 2017; Statistic Brain, 2016; Carlson & Lee, 2015).

Particularly within the contemporary music industry, Margiotta (2012) suggests that it is essential for musicians to consider a viral marketing strategy. Not only are online peer-to-peer communications an efficient and more cost effective way of reaching a wider following, but they can also be a more personal way of connecting with your audience (Brodie, 2013).

Although the music industry is very broad, with a wide variety of roles within in it, viral marketing is utilised throughout. However, each role within the industry may have different implications regarding how a viral marketing strategy is applied. Therefore, this research will aim to understand how viral marketing is employed through various contexts within the music industry.

1.2. Research question

The aim of this research is to critically examine the use of viral marketing within the music industry. Specifically, how peer to peer communications can be utilised by independent musicians to gain a higher following throughout the industry.

The objectives for this research are as follows:

1) To discuss how word-of-mouth communications can be utilised through online platforms

2) To critically analyse the various uses of social media within a musician's marketing strategy

3) To investigate how specific groups can be targeted as a way of influencing peers

4) To identify the role of branding in the music industry

1.3. Justification for the research

Although there has been substantial research into the use of online peer-to-peer communications throughout various industries, there has been limited academic insight into how viral marketing is utilised within the music industry. However, with the use of online peer-to-peer communications becoming increasingly prevalent, it is a critical area for academics to consider. This research may be regarded as innovative, due to this gap in literature.

As word of mouth communications have become an increasingly crucial factor in how musicians gain a greater following, the development of online marketing has only increased the opportunities for a musician to market themselves to a wider audience. Therefore, this research is not only innovative in an academic sense, but also incorporates highly practical insights, applicable for contemporary musicians. However, although this research may have been current at the time of researching, it shall need to be revisited, due to the ever-changing culture of modern technology and consumer behaviour.

This research shall be focussing particularly on independent musicians. An independent musician in the context of this research, is defined by Brown (2012) as a musician that is not signed to a record label. This has several different implications compared to artists that are signed to a record label, especially major record labels. As major record labels, would

typically have a team of marketers and a larger budget, there would be different approaches to that of an independent musician. As an independent artist may not have a large budget, utilising viral marketing could therefore, be a low cost and effective way of marketing themselves. Although, both may use viral marketing techniques, the participants in this research will come from an independent background, as they will have full control over their own marketing decisions. With an increasing number of musicians embarking on careers independently, this research has become particularly relevant to the industry.

Although, this research shall be focusing specifically on viral marketing within the music industry, certain themes may be similar throughout various fields. Literature regarding separate industries shall also be considered, therefore, the findings of this research may potentially be applicable for a variety of professions.

1.4. Outline methodology

Due to the nature of the research question, it was important for the research to be considered from a contextual stance, therefore, this study was approached through an interpretivist philosophy. As a set of results was being used to develop a hypothesis, this research was inductive. To ensure that the full context surrounding the research question was considered, qualitative methods were used. By conducting semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to collect deep and insightful data based on the narrative of each participant. The data was then transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically to identify key themes and differences throughout the various roles within the music industry.

1.5. Outline of the chapters

This aim of the initial chapter is to introduce the research project and briefly establish how the research question will be approached. The second chapter of this research is the literature review. In this section, the aim is to critically analyse all of the relevant literature surrounding the research topic. Chapter three is the methodology section of the project. This is where the methods chosen to answer the research question are detailed and justified and the ethical considerations are discussed. In chapter four, the data is analysed and key themes throughout the research were identified. In chapter five, the researcher will draw conclusions from the data analysis in relation to the research question and literature review. Managerial implications, limitations and recommendations for future research shall also be discussed.

1.6. Definitions

In the context of this research, an independent musician is a musician that is not signed to record company (Brown, 2012). This was important for this research as it was crucial that the participants had full control over their own marketing decisions.

An original artist in the context of this research, is a musician that performs original material. By performing material which they have written themselves, this has several different implications to musicians that perform other people's music.

A function band is a band that usually performs music from one particular genre or era. They are often hired for functions such as weddings and parties.

A session musician is a musician that is usually hired to perform either for studio recordings or live performances. These musicians are typically freelance and are hired on a temporary basis for particular projects.

1.7. Summary

This chapter introduces the research problem and research question. The research is then rationalised, the methodology is described and justified, definitions are presented and the chapters of the dissertation are outlined. Upon these foundations, the Management Research Project-Dissertation shall proceed with a detailed description of the research.

2. Literature Review

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2.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter was to critically analyse the relevant literature surrounding the research topic. By identifying the parents themes within the research, the researcher was firstly able to gain a holistic understanding of the research area. However, by exploring the specific literature within these themes, the researcher was also able to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

2.2. Viral marketing

2.2.1 Peer-to-peer communication

Viral marketing has become such an effective tool for marketers, due to not only its low cost, but also its ability to propagate a message across a much larger platform at a considerably faster rate. Compared to more traditional methods of marketing, utilising

online peer-to-peer communications provides a more efficient, cost effective and accessible way of sharing information. It is therefore essential, particularly given the exponential growth of online technology usage around the world, that organisations adopt some form of viral marketing strategy. (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008; Fill, 2009; Harvey, Stewart and Ewing, 2011; Nigam, 2012).

Compared to other, more traditional forms of mass media marketing, viral marketing provides the opportunity for more personal interactions as it allows for feedback, clarification and ongoing, back and forth communication. As demonstrated in Shannon and Weaver's (1949) communication model, communication is a two-way stream between companies and consumers. Not only do companies send a message to customers, but also receive feedback. However, where traditionally this feedback may have been collected through market research, it can now be done through online peer-to-peer communications.

Fill's (2009) 'Multi-step flow of communications' model, demonstrates how mass media communications can often be blocked out by 'noise', however, through peer-to-peer communications, the intended message is still received by consumers.

Nigam (2012) argues that viral marketing is not only a more efficient way of spreading a company's message, but also an effective way of building brand equity. Through online peer to peer communication, a company can utilise the opinions of consumers, to provide insight from an impartial perspective. As the opinions are coming from an external, seemingly neutral stance, they may be valued higher than a message coming directly from the company (Fill, 2009).

By targeting a specific market segment rather than a mass audience, Harvey, Stewart and Ewing (2011) suggest that this may be an effective way of reaching a more appropriate range of consumers. Kramer (2009) suggests that millennials are the most likely demographic to engage in peer-to-peer communications. Not only this, but they are also more likely to be influenced by peers. Therefore, it is essential for marketers to target this segment. Due to their experience with technology, when targeting millennials, marketers should focus on using digital methods of marketing such as social media and content marketing (Barton, Koslow & Beauchamp, 2014).

However, Botha and Reyneke (2013), suggest that before releasing content online, there are several things that should firstly be considered. Their research suggests that consumers are more likely to share content, if it causes an emotional reaction. As consumers are likely to share content that is either particularly positive, or particularly negative, it is essential that marketers consider the emotive impact of their content. They also suggest that, particularly with 'generation Y' consumers, it is important that any media content released is of a high quality. Although the content may have the capacity to go viral, a consumer may be reluctant to share if it is not high quality.

Also, Fill (2009), suggests that by targeting more influential consumers, such as opinion leaders, viral marketing can have higher success rates. Due to their perceived expertise, or higher social status, the recommendations of opinion leaders are often valued higher by peers. Opinion leadership is an effective marketing tool because although opinion leaders may be perceived as experts within a field, as they are not associated with the brand; their opinion will be considered objective and unbiased. Additionally, Sun, Youn, Wu and Kuntaraporn (2006), suggest that as opinion leaders play such a pivotal role in the diffusion

of information about a product, it is therefore essential to target them, if a larger audience is to be reached.

Koenigstein and Shavitt's (2012) research discusses how record labels use peer-to-peer communications as a way of talent scouting. As artist and repertoire (A&R) representatives have traditionally used word-of-mouth as a way of discovering new artists, the rise in online peer-to-peer communications have made it easier for labels to source 'up-and coming' musicians. By utilising peer-to-peer communications, record companies can gauge the popularity of an artist, without having to see them live, therefore, saving time and cost. As it is important for record labels to be the first to locate potentially successful artists, peer to peer communications have therefore, become a lucrative avenue of discovering new talent.

2.2.2. Social Media

With over 2.6 billion users worldwide, social media has fast become a global phenomenon, changing the way consumers communicate and interact online. With Facebook having over 1 billion users, Twitter 328 million, Instagram over 700 million and YouTube gaining over 4.95 billion hits everyday, social media platforms have become a fast and efficient way of sharing content online. With 56% of the world using social media, many businesses have sought to utilise them as a way of promoting their brand. Due to the vast number of users, not only can companies distribute their own content on a mass scale, but through peer-to-peer communications there is the potential for content to go viral (Statista, 2017; Statistic Brain, 2016; Carlson & Lee, 2015).

Although these networks have become an effective way for companies to create brand awareness, they have also provided a greater opportunity for consumer engagement. By

directly communicating through social media, companies can develop a more personal relationship with their customers. Not only do social media sites allow for companies to communicate with consumers, but also for the customer to feedback to the company. Compared to more traditional methods of marketing, social media allows a back and forth between both parties, therefore making it easier for companies to track the success of their products or services (Wiertz and de Ruyter, 2007).

Gholston, Kuofie and Hakin (2016), suggest that it is particularly essential for small businesses to adopt a social media presence. Not only is social media an effective way to interact with customers, but is also an efficient way of creating awareness for lesser known brands. By utilising social media platforms, small businesses can gain exposure on a wider scale, at less cost.

Their research also suggests that rather than focusing on sales, companies should focus on building relationships with consumers (Gholston, Kuofie and Hakin, 2016). Through consumer engagement, companies can build stronger, lasting relationships which create opportunities for brand loyalty and repeat purchases. The more engaged a consumer is with a brand, the more likely they will be to participate in peer-to-peer sharing communication (Sashi, 2012; Bowden, 2009).

It is also essential that businesses have a social media strategy. By frequently posting on social media and sharing content, companies can retain interest and keep consumers engaged (Gholston, Kuofie and Hakin, 2016). However, it is also important that content is not shared too often. Due to the amount of material shared, the online market can often appear cluttered. Therefore, if a company posts too often on social media, it could be perceived as spam (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008).

Although social networks have proved an efficient way of spreading a company's message, Pfeffer, Zorbach and Carley (2013) warn that marketers must be cautious with the content they share online, as a message may not always be interpreted as intended. If a negative 'buzz' is started, it can become very difficult to stop. Due to the nature of viral marketing, this content could therefore be shared across the world within minutes using social media. Buttle (1998), suggests that consumers are often more likely to share their experiences if they are negative. Therefore, marketers should be cautious before posting on social media, as a negative 'buzz' could not only influence the costumer, but also damage the reputation of the brand.

Social media has become particularly important for musicians as not only does it allow for music to be shared on a wider scale, but it creates a direct a communication channel between artists and fans. Through personal interactions online, consumers are likely to develop a positive affiliation with an artist. As a relationship between an artist and consumer develops, the consumer may become likely to engage with peer-to-peer sharing (Daellenbach, Kusel & Rod, 2015).

2.2.3. Branding

Decrop and Derbaix (2014) state that it is becoming increasingly important for musicians to focus on branding, suggesting that artists themselves are essentially brand managers. Hatch and Shultz (2001) also suggest that a brand can become so valuable, that it eventually becomes worth more than the financial assets of a company itself. Therefore, it is essential that musicians adopt at least some form of branding, as Kubacki and Croft (2004) agrees that the rise of popular music throughout the years has been a result of the music industries emphasis on branding.

Further, Hatch and Schultz (2001) describe brand image as the way a brand is perceived by the public. It is important for organisations to develop a strong brand image, as this is how brands become recognisable. Developing brand image can also gain consumer trust, as by becoming renowned for a particular thing reduces perceived risk (Davis, 2007).

Although brand image is created externally via the perceptions of stakeholders, Hatch and Schultz (2001) state that image is shaped by the vision and culture of a brand, which are internal factors. In the 'VCI' model, Hatch and Schultz (2001), explain how the relationships between vision, culture and image should correlate in order to form a consistency throughout the brand, thus the image of a brand should ideally be perceived as intended by the originator of the brand. Therefore, any gaps between the vision, culture or image of a brand may lead to confusion and a dilution of the brand.

A gap between the culture and image of the brand may be caused by differences between the consumer's initial perceptions of the brand and the reality of their experiences. This can be detrimental as it can lead to confusion within the consumer's opinions of a brand and therefore lead to mistrust. Hatch and Schultz (2001) suggest that it is essential that a brand remains consistent within its vision, culture and image if it is to gain the trust of the consumer. This therefore suggests that, when sharing anything online or engaging with consumers on social media, it is imperative that the content is reflective of what the brand stands for.

Wiertz and de Ruyter (2007) discuss the idea of online brand communities. In these communities, a consumer is able to interact not only with the brand itself, but also other consumers through peer-to-peer communication and information sharing. By engaging with

the brand in a more personal way, Brodie (2013) suggests that this is how deeper relationships are formed, as it is through social functions that consumers feel the highest level of engagement.

This can also be displayed through Sashi's 'customer engagement cycle' (2012). Through positive interactions, consumers begin to form a trust and deeper relationship with the brand. Once a consumer is committed to a brand, there is also the potential for brand advocacy. As an advocate of the brand, the consumer is likely to engage in peer-to-peer communications. Once a customer is fully engaged, Sashi (2012) suggests that not only will there be brand loyalty, but the consumer will spread positive messages about the brand amongst people with whom they interact.

2.3. Consumer behaviour and artist revenue

2.3.1. Streaming and record sales

Through the rise in technology and continued developments within the modern internet era, the music industry has constantly had to adapt to keep up with current consumer trends. With consumers now possessing the ability to obtain music at the click of a button, this has created several implications for the music industry.

Although it has become easier for artists to share their music on a much larger scale (Spangler, 2009; Asvanund, Clay, Ramayya & Smith, 2004; Shang, Chen & Chen, 2008), there have been several negative connotations of online file sharing. In 2007, Sandulli discussed how the rise of online streaming and illegally downloading music negatively affected global music sales. Since the introduction of peer to peer sharing sites such as Napster in 1999,

many academics have attributed the decline of record sales to the impact of online file sharing (Liebowitz, 2016; Connolly & Krueger, 2005; Hong, 2011; Barker and Maloney, 2012; Walsh, Vincent-Wayne, Frenzel & Wiedmann, 2003).

Sandulli discusses how the arrival of downloadable MP3 files, eradicated consumer's need for physical music sales, as they were not only cheaper, but also faster and more convenient Sandulli (2007). Rather than visiting a music store and purchasing a physical copy, it became much easier for a consumer to download an entire album online. Within a matter of minutes, a consumer can gain access to a plethora of music from an almost unlimited catalogue (Sandulli, 2007; Walsh et al., 2003). Therefore, the need to purchase physical copies of music diminished, rendering the compact disc format, seemingly redundant.

Although consumers can purchase music online through websites such as iTunes or Amazon MP3, downloading music illegally is still a prominent source for acquiring music online. However, Sandulli's research also suggests that some consumers may use illegal downloading merely as an accompaniment to purchasing physical copies of music. Although this could be due to the experience of owning a tangible product, consumers who have a positive association with an artist, may be more inclined to pay for their music (Sandulli, 2007; Sinclair and Green, 2015).

Sinclair and Green suggest that certain consumers tend to pay for music, if it belongs to smaller, less established musicians. By supporting these lesser known artists, consumers believe they are engaging in social responsibility, and that more established, "mainstream" artists do not benefit as significantly from these payments (2015). Despite this, the accumulation of consumers opting to illegally download music, has resulted in a severe loss

of income for “mainstream” artists (Liebowitz, 2016; Connolly & Krueger, 2005; Hong, 2011; Barker and Maloney, 2012; Walsh, Vincent-Wayne, Frenzel & Wiedmann, 2003).

Sandulli (2007) research suggests that ‘generation Y’ consumers have a higher tendency to illegally download music. Sandulli (2007) suggests that although this could be linked to the higher incomes and lower price sensitivity of older consumers, this could also be due to the attitudes of the younger demographic, perhaps not considering streaming music to be illegal.

Despite many academics having closely linked the rise in file sharing with the decline in record sales, others, such as Oberholzer-Gee and Strumpf (2007) state that there is not enough statistical evidence to justify the connection and suggests there may be several other factors that have influenced the decline in record sales.

Despite this, there has been substantial research implying that file sharing has had a negative effect on record sales. Throughout the years, many artists have also campaigned against illegal file sharing. In 2000, Metallica, won a law suit against peer-to-peer sharing site, Napster for copyright infringement after leaking unreleased material (Marshall, 2002).

However, according to a 2016 report by the IFPI, digital sales accounted for 50% of global music revenue. Despite a 20.5% decline in digital download sales, a 60.4% increase in streaming revenue was responsible for digital sales becoming the leading revenue source for the recording industry worldwide (IFPI, 2016). Although these sales do not come from piracy or illegal downloading directly, Shields (2009), suggests that consumers who engage in illegal downloading are also more likely to spend more money on purchasing music.

2.3.2. File sharing and live music

Dewenter, Haucap and Wenzel (2012), discuss the correlation between online file sharing and live performance. Their research suggests that through online file sharing and peer to peer communication, artists can gain a greater exposure and therefore create awareness for live performances. Although artists may not receive much income through record sales, there is the potential for greater ticket sales to live concerts.

Curien and Moreau (2009) state that although file sharing may have a negative effect on record sales directly, overall, it's impact on the music industry may be positive. Through the diffusion of music, artists can gain a greater audience, thus increasing revenue in other areas such as ticket sales and merchandising.

Curien and Moreau (2009) also suggest that without file sharing, certain consumers may be less likely to discover new music and would therefore be less likely to become stakeholders within the live performance market. As peer-to-peer file sharing creates an opportunity for artists to gain a larger following, Curtin and Moreau suggest that this may balance out the losses in record sales.

As ticket prices for live performances have increased throughout the years, Decrop and Derbaix (2014) suggest that this is a way for artists to make up for lack of record sales. By charging a greater price, artists can compensate for the royalties which they may have previously received. They also suggest that more established musicians may charge higher ticket prices, due to the loyalty of their fanbases willing to pay a premium price.

Decrop and Derbaix (2014) suggest that, where musicians traditionally toured to promote the record sales, artists now release records to promote tours. As an artist's highest form of

revenue has switched from record sales to live performances, it is not only important that musician's tour more frequently, but the length of tours has increased (Dejean, 2009).

Dejean (2009) states that the evolution of number of concerts and the raised price of tickets draws parallel with the rise of file sharing. Dejean (2009) also suggests that artist's main incomes are usually received from live performances, while revenue received from record sales, usually goes to the record companies and producers. This would therefore suggest that there is a higher personal incentive for artists to perform more frequently. However, the literature suggests that peer-to-peer file sharing could be manipulated by artists to gain a wider following, in turn, creating an opportunity for greater revenue in live performances.

2.5. Summary

Throughout this chapter, the various literature streams surrounding the research topic were critically discussed. By firstly identifying the parent themes, the researcher was able to gain a broad overview of the research area. However, by analysing the specific areas within each of the parent themes, the researcher was able to gather a thorough and detailed insight of the literature.

3. Methodology

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3.1. Introduction

During this chapter, the researcher discussed and justified the methods that were used to investigate the research question. The ethical considerations, limitations and validity were also discussed along with the researcher's choices of sample.

3.2. Research paradigm

Before conducting any research, it was firstly essential for the researcher to decide upon which philosophical stance it would reflect. Due to the nature of the research question, it was decided that the research would be considered from an interpretivist paradigm rather than a positivist. A positivist ontology suggests that there is a single, objective reality (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). The epistemological implications of this are that, research is based purely on scientific data and measurable statistics. Many academics argue however,

that due to the complexity of social constructs, a positivist ontology cannot be justifiably used in business research (Hasan, 2016).

In contrast to this, the interpretivist ontology is that reality is multiple and relative.

Interpretivists believe that reality is socially constructed, therefore, the epistemology is that research should be approached from a contextual stance (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). As there is a need for interpretivists to recognise situations from various social perspectives, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) state that it is crucial for researchers to adopt an empathetic view. Therefore, when conducting this research, the various genres, aspirations and career phases of an artist were all considered.

3.3. Qualitative research

As stated above, the aim of this research was to critically examine the use of viral marketing within the music industry. Therefore, the research conducted to achieve this aim was inductive, as a set of results was used to develop a hypothesis, rather than deductive research, where an existing hypothesis is tested to produce a set of results (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008).

While deductive research is usually concerned with quantitative research, using scientific and statistical approaches to test existing theory, inductive research is usually more associated with qualitative methods.

As this research included participants from a variety of musical and professional backgrounds; there was potential for varied responses to different questions. Thus, the data produced throughout this research should be considered on a contextual basis. Due to the

scientific and definite nature of quantitative research, it can lead to generalisations within results. Therefore, a quantitative approach may not have been the most appropriate way of researching this question, as there may be more than one exact answer.

Conversely, qualitative methods are usually used to help understand the underlying reasons behind a research problem and addressing the context surrounding an issue (Yin, 2016).

Therefore, this research was conducted through a qualitative perspective.

3.4. Interviews

During this research, data was collected through an interview process. According to Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick (2008), there are three fundamental types of research interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Structured interviews typically consist of a set of fixed questions that are conducted in a formal setting. As the format for these types interviews are usually very rigid, there is often little room for elaboration. Therefore, due to the limited level of responses, structured interviews can often lack depth.

Unstructured interviews usually involve little or no preparation and are often based solely on the narrative of the participant. Through asking open ended questions, the structure of the interview is guided by the participant's answers. As the answers will vary due to the experiences of each participant, the data collected may be diverse. The disadvantages of these types of interviews are that they can be very time consuming and often become difficult to manage due to the lack of planning and structure. Data can also become difficult to analyse due to the potentially broad range of answers participants may give (Stuckey, 2013; Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick, 2008).

For this research, the interviews conducted were semi-structured. Unlike unstructured interviews, there was a set outline, however, the answers of the participants could influence the direction of the interview. The questions asked were predetermined, however using open ended questions allowed the participants to express themselves through their own experiences. By using follow up questions, participants were also encouraged to elaborate on their answers to gain a deeper insight. (Stuckey, 2013; Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick, 2008).

3.5. Sampling and selection

The participants used within this research came from a variety of roles within the music industry, including session musicians, original artists, function bands, and producers. It was important to include participants from a variety of roles within the music industry as they each may have different uses for viral marketing.

However, none of the participants used within this study were currently signed to any record labels or promotional networks, as it was crucial that participants were strictly unsigned musicians. Being independent from a record label meant that participants had full responsibility and control over their own marketing decisions. This was important as not only might a record company have more experience in marketing, but also may have access to a more extensive budget, and influence over the extent of the artists' autonomy. (Delava, Doyle, Shingler & Stearns, 2009; Kubacki and Croft, 2004).

It was also important for this research to gather information from a variety of demographics, as different genders, ethnicities and age groups each have different

tendencies online (Tamimi & Sebastianelli, 2016; Haryani & Motwani, 2015). The ages of participants used ranged from 18 to 58 and were a mixture of male and females. By collecting data from a range of participants, this research was able to gauge a more holistic view of how viral marketing is utilised within the music industry.

However, none of the participants were currently residing outside of the United Kingdom. By interviewing participants from a singular country, this ensured a concentrated set of results. As different countries may have, not only different behaviours online but also separate cultural norms or legislation, not all of the research would have been applicable to each (Doole & Lowe, 2012). Interviewing participants from several countries, therefore, may have led to the results of this research being too broad because of the many variables.

The majority of participants for this study were collected through the researcher's contacts within the music industry. However, further participants were gathered through 'snowball' sampling. Snowball sampling is often used when attempting to recruit participants whom it usually may be difficult to access (Noy, 2007). By gaining referrals from existing interviewees, the researcher was able to contact participants from various areas of the music industry, that they may not have been able to access on their own.

Interviews continued to be conducted until the findings of the research had saturated. As stated by Mason (2010), more data does not necessarily lead to more information.

Therefore, continuing to conduct research once a sample has saturated can be unproductive. Due to the 'open' nature of semi-structured interviews, interpreting data can also become very time consuming, as there is the potential for a vast amount of content.

After the sixth interview was conducted, it was therefore decided that it would be unnecessary to collect any more data, as no new results were emerging.

Dew (1999), however, argues that the notion of sample saturation is impractical, stating that often academics conclude data collection early and therefore, do not collect a large enough variety of information. Francis (2010) also argues that if a sample size is too small, the results may not necessarily reflect the full extent of the research area. Therefore, it was essential when collecting data, that the sample size was large enough to gather a variety of information whilst remaining a manageable size, to allow the researcher to look at each interview in depth.

3.6. Data collection

As this research was aimed at participants from a range of backgrounds, it was important to use methods that would allow the researcher to explore the various contexts behind each participant's experience. Semi-structured interviews therefore, would allow the researcher to ask all the participants the same questions, yet allow the interviews to be adapted according to each participant's narrative. Whilst conducting the interviews, a device was used to record the audio. The audio recordings were then transcribed verbatim.

After transcribing all of the interviews, the data was analysed thematically. By identifying common themes throughout the interviews, the researcher was able to isolate which themes were most significant.

Before interviewing any participants, it was firstly important for the researcher to conduct a pilot interview. As suggested by van Teijlingen and Hundley (2002), pilot studies are an efficient way of assessing how future interviews may unfold. Not only can a pilot interview be a way of identifying any potential problems, but also a way of gauging the participant's receptiveness to each question. However, van Teijlingen and Hundley (2002), also suggest

that researchers should consider carefully before making any assumptions or predictions based upon the initial interview, as subsequent participants may have differing views to the pilot interviewee. By assessing the pilot interviewee's responses to certain questions, the researcher was able to appropriately alter the pilot interview, in order to ensure that the most value was gained while interviewing actual participants.

3.7. Ethics, reliability, validity, generalisations and limitations

Before taking part in any research, each participant was given an ethics sheet to read and asked to sign a document stating that they had read the terms and conditions and agreed to participate. The participants also agreed to the interviews being audio recorded and transcribed to be used as exerts in the data analysis. As some participants wished to remain anonymous, pseudonyms were used.

Although the participants had been working in the music industry for varying amounts of time and were each at different stages of their career, they were all considered to be experts in their respective fields. Not only were the majority of participants able to make a living from their roles in the music industry, but several had widespread recognition.

As musicians were examined from a variety of contexts, it could be argued that the research may not be specific enough. However, due to the small sample size and the depth of semi-structured interviews, each participant was encouraged to provide a thorough and detailed account of their experiences. It could also be argued that as the research is concerned with various fields within the music industry, it is more valuable in providing a holistic view through multiple perspectives. Also several themes emerged that were consistent throughout interviews, despite the diversity of interviewees, suggesting some industry-wide

commonalities. For these reasons, although the small sample size may be seen as a limitation, as the sample began to saturate, continuing interviews may have become counter-productive.

Although this research is aimed at musicians throughout the United Kingdom, the majority of participants were from the West Midlands. This could be seen as a limitation as these participants may not necessarily represent the online behaviours of all UK musicians. As this research is looking at musicians in various roles within the music industry, there were already many variables. Focussing on musicians from a specific geographical location, therefore, was seen as leading to a more concentrated set of results.

The majority of the interviews conducted lasted around seven to ten minutes. This was a reasonable length as not only did it allow for interviewees to answer in depth, but it also ensured that the answers were to the point. One interview, however lasted around forty-four minutes. Due to the volume of information given, this interview was very time consuming to write-up and also contained a lot of irrelevant data. Semi-structured interviews are therefore limited due to the potential for participants to go off topic.

3.8. Summary

The research conducted in this study shall be qualitative and approached from an interpretivist philosophy. The study consisted of six semi-structured interviews with a range of participants throughout the music industry. Although the outlines of the interviews were all based on a similar format, the exact structure of each was dependant on the responses of each participant. By allowing the narrative of participants to lead each interview, the researcher was able to collect data that was individually significant to a variety of roles

within the music industry. Through the use of improvised follow-up and prompting questions, the researcher was also able to gain deep in and insightful answers from interviewees.

The interviews were then transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically. By identifying common themes throughout the interviews, the researcher was able to isolate which information was most applicable throughout the music industry. The researcher was also able to distinguish between the different behaviours of participants to identify how musicians from different roles in the music industry may approach viral marketing in different ways.

4. Data analysis and interpretations

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4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the data was analysed thematically. By identifying common themes and key differences throughout the interviews, the researcher was able to isolate which data was significant. The data is also grouped systematically in relation to the literature review.

4.2. Sample

Participant	Name	Age	Gender	Role
1	Katherine	22	Female	Music tutor
2	Craig	23	Male	Producer
3	Albert	28	Male	Songwriter
4	Liam	34	Male	Function band
5	Tony	57	Male	Promoter
6	Lucy	25	Female	Songwriter

4.3. Social media

When asked what methods they used to promote themselves, the immediate answer from each of the participants was social media. By utilizing networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, participants all agreed that they were able to target a wider audience at a faster, more efficient rate.

Aside from *Craig*, the rest of the participants that were recording artists, main source of revenue actually came from live performance. As suggested by Decrop and Derbaix (2014), artists are now using recordings to promote performances rather than more traditionally using performances to promote record sales.

“It’s all about gigs really. Because we don’t really get paid much for our recordings or anything, I suppose that’s the nature of the industry now, so everything we earn is through gigs. So we kind of use our songs to promote that. By putting our songs online for free, if people like them then hopefully they’ll come to see us. [Lucy]

By sharing music online for free, artists can gain a wider exposure and therefore potentially make up for lack of record sales through higher tickets sales and merchandising (Curien and Moreau, 2009).

“Through social media and everything, it’s definitely easier to gain a larger following nowadays. Although we don’t actually make money from selling our songs... well actually, I suppose we do, because the songs are what get people to the gigs. By sharing our stuff on social media, our fan base has grown massively. So now it’s much easier to sell tickets and that’s how we make our money.” [Albert]

Although *Liam* and *Tony* stated that they only used Facebook, the rest of the participants all use a variety of social media platforms. However it was *Albert* and *Lucy* that seemed to stress the importance of utilizing a mixture networks the most.

"I think it's definitely becoming more important to use a variety of different social media sites. I mean everyone is on Facebook, but Instagram is becoming really important, Twitter is great just for communicating with fans as well. I think especially for recordings artists it's vital to be on stuff like Soundcloud and Spotify too. The internet is a very busy place so you've just got to get your stuff on everything. That's what everyone else is doing." [Lucy]

Compared to more traditional methods of marketing, the general consensus across all of the participants was that it has also become easier to target a particular audience. *Liam*, discussed how due to the increasing number of consumers from an older demographic beginning to use Facebook, it has not only enhanced their ability to promote performances, but also to communicate with their target audience.

"Because our music is mainly from the 70s and 80s, we're mostly targeted at an older audience, the people who were actually growing up around that sort of music. As more and more older people are starting to use Facebook, it's becoming so much easier for us to promote gigs online." [Liam]

Craig, however, whose music is targeted more towards millennials, stressed the growing importance of utilizing Instagram to target this younger demographic.

"I mean obviously I still use Facebook a lot, but the big is thing definitely Instagram at the moment. It's massive now, especially for the younger generation. Just because

kids are always on their phones looking at 'memes' or whatever, it's just a great way to connect with your audience." [Craig]

However, with over one billion users, Facebook is by far the largest social media network. Craig also discussed how, with its large variety of functions, Facebook is the most versatile social network in terms of peer-to-peer communications.

"Although Instagram is cool, it is a bit limited in terms of what functions it has. It's just for sharing pictures really, which is great. But if you want to do things like make events and stuff, then you have to go on Facebook. Also it's so much easier for people to share your stuff on Facebook." [Craig]

As suggested by Kramer (2009), millennials are the demographic that are most likely to engage in peer-to-peer communications. Therefore, by targeting millennials, there is the greater potential for content to spread to a wider audience or even go viral.

"I think you have to target the younger generation really. I mean that's our audience anyway, but I just think that they're the most likely to share things online. Because we've grown up around technology, it's second nature. I mean I'll probably share four or five things a day to be honest. I don't think any other demographic would engage that much is online sharing." [Albert]

However, according to Lucy, it is not only millennials who are likely to engage in peer-to-peer communications.

"It's not just younger people though. Recently we've had quite a lot of the older generation sharing our posts! But I suppose that might be to do with the growing number of the older people going online nowadays. I mean all of our grandparents

are on Facebook now; they're probably on it more than we are. And they share all of our videos on their friend's 'walls' or whatever, it's a proper little community." [Lucy]

The idea of online communities is also discussed by Wiertz and de Ruyter (2007). Through online brand communities, consumers can engage not only with the brand, but also with other consumers through peer-to-peer communication and information sharing. Brodie (2013) also agrees that it is through social functions, that a consumer feels most engaged with a brand. This therefore suggests, that it is essential for musicians to not only share content on social media, but to also engage in some form of dialogue with consumers (Wiertz and de Ruyter, 2007; Brodie, 2013).

4.4. Engagement

Aside from sharing music or promoting live performances, some participants also discussed sharing more personal content online. By sharing more intimate material, musicians are able to connect with their audience on a personal level and therefore, develop a deeper relationship.

"I'll post things like pictures in the studio or 'selfies' on the way to rehearsal or whatever just to keep fans in the loop. Well not only that, but by sharing more personal stuff, I guess they feel more involved with the music. Rather than just posting a song or whatever, by sharing personal, lifestyle stuff, you can develop a more intimate relationship with your audience." [Albert]

As explained in Sashi's 'customer engagement cycle' (2012), through positive interactions with a musician, consumers are more likely to build lasting relationships and eventually

develop a commitment to the artist. Once an emotional attachment has formed, there is also the potential for not only brand loyalty, but also brand advocacy. As an advocate of the brand, the customer is therefore more likely to engage in peer-to-peer communications. The research therefore suggests that is crucial for an artist to engage with consumers on a personal level.

One participant however, warned against sharing personal content too often. As personal content may not necessarily be relevant to the music, sharing it too often could potentially dilute the brand (Loken and John, 1993).

“I would be careful how much personal stuff you share though. Cause although it’s good to keep your audience updated with what you’re doing, if you post too often, it kind of becomes insignificant. That’s what my personal account is for. You still want to make sure that your musician profile is primarily focused on your music.” [Craig]

4.5. Peer-to-peer communications

According to the research, the majority of participants interviewed have engaged in sharing other artists’ music online. However, many of the participants expressed that if they shared a fellow musician’s content, then they expected to have their own content shared in return. Although this motive was similar across most of the participants, it was songwriters and original artists who seemed to put the most emphasis on this.

“Yeah I mean it goes without saying, if I share your stuff than I kind of expect that you’ll share mine. That’s what it’s all about really, supporting each other. I mean,

how can you expect people to share your music if you won't even share theirs?"

[Craig]

One participant also spoke about the idea of musicians as part of an online community. By creating a network of musicians, there is the greater potential for musicians engaging in peer-to-peer communication due to the common incentive of artists getting their own shared.

"It's a networking thing really. You need to get a community going with other musicians. Because you think by sharing other people's music and helping people, you are leaving the door open for yourself." *[Lucy]*

4.6. Posting times

A common theme throughout the interviews was which times were the best to post content on social media. The majority of participants agreed that the most advantageous times of sharing were between the hours of 6pm-10pm. Reasons for this were because these were the times when most people in the United Kingdom had arrived home from work and were most likely to be online.

"I always try to post after working hours, probably about 6pm, maybe 7pm. I avoid posting during the day as most people at work and might not have access to a phone or tablet or whatever to access the internet." *[Craig]*

One participant however, expanded on this, stating that posting during these times also had an international purpose.

“It’s not just because of the United Kingdom either. Because the main places are obviously Europe and America, so if you post at that time, like I said, everyone in the UK is getting home from work and they’re looking at their phones more, but you’re also catching the early afternoon people in America.” [Katherine]

Some participants also suggested that between the hours of 12pm-1pm could also be beneficial posting times due to people at work browsing social media during their lunch breaks.

Although the majority of participants agreed that posting between the times of 6pm-10pm were the most beneficial, one participant did however warn against posting late in the evening.

“I think it’s important to make sure you are not posting too late either, particularly on weekends or a Friday night. You want to catch people when they’ve got home from work but also before they’ve gone out to the pub or whatever.” [Lucy]

The frequency of which content was shared online was also varied across participants.

While some participants stated that they post online every day, others might only post once a week or even less frequently. As different participants have a variety of roles in the industry, some may not necessarily need to post as often as others. For example, this research suggests that music tutors do not need to post as frequently as songwriters or producers.

According to this research, the participants that post online the most frequently are original artists. *Albert*, who posts an average once every two days, suggests that this could be due to the variety of content that original artists have to promote.

"I think as an original artist you have to do a lot more online in terms of promotion. If you're a function band then you're probably only going to be promoting the occasional gig on Facebook. But as an artist, we have to promote gigs, promote our records, merchandise and everything. And at the same time we're trying to build relationships with fans on social media. So it seems like we're posting stuff every day." [Albert]

After producing a new record, *Craig* discussed how for several weeks all posts on social media would be dedicated to its release.

"For every new song that I make, I like to 'hype' it up bit before the actual release. First of all, I'll simply mention that I'm working on a track or that I'm collaborating with someone. Then I'll post some pictures of me working in the studio or whatever. Then maybe I'll release like a 10 second clip of the song as a teaser. Just to keep people excited and up to date with what's going on. So I'm probably posting 3 or 4 times per song. I think it builds the anticipation." [Craig]

Although several participants agreed that it was important to post frequently, *Katherine* argued that posting too often could be counter-productive, as each post may lose its significance.

"I suppose it's about quality over quantity. The benefits of posting sporadically are that your posts are more relevant and because it's really important to keep your image consistent, you need to have less random posts. So posting less frequently, your posts are going to be more defined. Although it's important to keep people

updated, when people are posting like ten times a day, you kind of stop caring"

[Katherine]

The posting habits of each participant however, may also depend on their level of workload at that particular time. As musicians may experience episodes of intense workload followed by quieter intervals, the need to promote themselves online may fluctuate.

"It depends how busy I am to be honest. Sometimes I might have four gigs in a week and three songs that I need to release, so I'll be posting pretty much every day. But sometimes I'll have nothing for weeks and you won't hear from me at all." [Liam]

Lucy however, argued that it is vital for musicians to adopt some form of plan for posting online. By structuring how often content is posted, participant 6 suggests that you can keep the audience interested without overloading them with material.

"I think it's really important to have a plan. You see loads of people posting so randomly. I mean one week they'll post like twenty things and then you won't see anything for like a month. I try to plan all of my posts in advance, so I'm always posting consistently. That way my fans are kept up to date, but they're not being attacked all at once with information." [Lucy]

4.7. Opinion leaders

Several participants also spoke about sharing content through third-party accounts on social media. Whether through Facebook, Instagram or YouTube, musicians can get their message across to a wider audience, by utilising these platforms to target not only their own followers, but also the followers of that particular page or group.

“There are actually a lot of YouTube channels that you can send videos to and if they’re good enough they’ll take them and upload them to their account. And they’ve got loads of subscribers, like in the thousands and millions. So, once they share your video, immediately you’re getting more listeners. Once they took some of our songs we were getting between like, 10,000 and 30,000 views.” [Craig]

Due to their highly influential positions, these platforms could be considered a form of opinion leadership. As opinion leaders are often considered experts within their field, consumers usually tend to value their opinion higher than others. As opinion leaders usually have no personal affiliation with what they are endorsing, consumers are more likely to trust them (Fill, 2009).

“There are a few accounts on Instagram that share loads of clips of people performing and stuff. If you hashtag them in one of your videos they might post it on their page but they usually only put the really good stuff on there, so if they share your video then you know it’s good. If it’s on something like that people are probably more likely to listen to it as well, because they know it’s going to a decent standard.” [Albert]

Therefore, by targeting these platforms, not only can musicians gain a wider following but can also receive a valuable endorsement from highly influential opinion leaders.

4.8. Branding

Almost all of the participants agreed that it was essential for musicians to adopt at least some form of branding. However, it was original artists and songwriters that seemed to put

the most emphasis on the importance of branding. By developing themselves as a brand, participants found that it not only enhanced their ability to find work, but also their ability to target a particular audience.

"I feel that branding has played a massive role for us. I mean, you have to get known for a particular thing, that's how you place yourself in the industry. Once we established ourselves as an Indie band, it was much easier to find the right kind of gigs. By placing yourself in a particular scene, it becomes easier to target an audience." [Lucy]

Several participants also agreed that it is crucial for bands to remain consistent within their branding. As suggested by Hatch and Schultz (2001), it is important for the image of a brand to reflect its value and culture. Therefore, bands must be cautious while posting online, as sharing inconsistent content could potentially dilute the brand.

"You have to portray yourself in a certain way, not only in real life but also online. But it has to be consistent, whatever your persona is in real life, it has to be the same online. And if you act a certain way on Instagram or whatever, it's got to be the same on Facebook." [Albert]

One participant put particular emphasis on branding in the early stages of a musician's career, arguing that this is possibly the most crucial time as an artist to develop their brand.

"Especially when you're first starting out, you have to get known for something. You never get a second chance to make a first impression, so you kind of have to define yourselves from the beginning. By developing yourselves as a brand, people begin to recognise you. This is probably the most crucial time to be honest. Once you've

established yourselves you can start playing around with your brand a bit more, but at the beginning it's very important to stay consistent." [Lucy]

The research also suggests that branding can play a particularly important role for function bands. As certain aesthetics are often associated with particular styles of music, adopting a specific image can be crucial for a band's success.

"Yeah branding is incredibly important for us. We spent a lot of time as a 70s glam rock act, so obviously we had all the costumes and everything for every gig, so it was also important that on all of our Facebook pictures that we were seen wearing the costumes. So at that time, if people were ever looking to book a glam rock or 70s band, we were always at the front of their minds." [Liam]

Where the emphasis for function-bands and original artists seemed to be focused on portraying a particular persona, tutors and session musicians seemed to be focused more simply upon professionalism and portraying themselves appropriately online.

"I suppose it's the same with session players too, if you're the person that's known for being a really professional bass player for example, you're always on time and you know your parts, you're gonna jump to the top of the queue. But you can be the best bass player and if you act unprofessionally online, it can seriously damage your reputation. And for me, when I was a session player, my reputation is what got me the majority of my gigs." [Tony]

One participant suggested that this could be due to the roles of a music tutor or session musician being more service based compared to songwriters, where their personality arguably forms a significant part of their brand appeal.

“As a vocal coach, everything is focused towards the student. It’s about what services you can offer them. For example my posts on Facebook, I’ll say things like ‘Learn to improve YOUR singing ability’ or ‘if this sounds like YOU, get in touch.’ It’s all about catering towards the customer. And if I talk about myself, it’ll just be me saying what experiences I have and what I can offer to the student.” [Katherine]

4.9. Summary

By utilising thematic analysis, the researcher was able to identify common themes throughout the data. Although there were themes that were consistent throughout, as the participants came from a variety of roles within the music industry, the data gathered contained a plethora of results. By structuring the results in relation to the literature review the researcher was able to identify common occurrences relevant to the research question.

5. Conclusions

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5.1. Introduction

The key themes that were identified throughout the data analysis were drawn together to form conclusions. The managerial implications of these conclusions are then discussed. This section also discusses the limitations and recommendations for future research.

5.2. Methodology

In this qualitative study, research was conducted from an interpretivist paradigm. As this research was focused on musicians from various roles within the music industry, it was important that each participant's perspective was considered contextually.

By conducting semi-structured interviews, this not only allowed the researcher to collect a wide range of data, but also allowed participants to express themselves freely. By allowing interviewees to express themselves through their own experiences, this led to deeper and more insightful interviews. As the participants came from a variety of roles within the music industry, each gave their own unique insight into the utilisation of viral marketing. However,

as the structure of the interviews was based on the interviewees' own narrative, several interviews had the tendency to drift 'off-topic'. Although the researcher could often direct the interviews back to a more relevant route through prompting and follow-up questions, this was sometimes not possible and led to the collection of a mass amount of irrelevant data.

However, as proved through the thematic analysis of the data, there were a lot of correlating themes and although each participant had their own unique insight into viral marketing, several tendencies were consistent throughout. Therefore, semi-structured interviews, seemed to be an appropriate way of collecting the data.

5.3. Conclusions

As suggested by the literature, the data analysis reaffirms the notion that musicians' focus has shifted from record sales to live performance. Rather than the previous format of using live performance to promote record sales, this research suggests that musicians are now more likely to use recordings to promote live performance. By releasing music online for free, several participants suggested that they are likely to gain a larger audience. Although no revenue is gained through royalties, the larger following is in turn more valuable. Despite the lack of revenue gained through record sales, musicians can accommodate this through ticket sales for live performances. This therefore suggests that to achieve a greater amount of revenue, content must be shared to a wider following as possible, to attract higher ticket sales (Dejean, 2009; Decrop and Derbaix, 2014).

All of the participants agreed that the most efficient way of utilising a viral marketing strategy was through the use of social media platforms. With over 2.6 billion users on social

media worldwide (Statista, 2017), social networks are a lucrative way of spreading a message through peer-to-peer communications.

Although several participants utilised a variety of social media platforms, Facebook was used by all of the participants. With over 1 billion users worldwide (Statista, 2017), Facebook is by far the most heavily populated social network and therefore, can be used to target a plethora of consumers. As the most versatile social media, participants stated several uses for its variety of functions.

There were also several common themes regarding the online posting habits of participants. The majority of participants agreed that the most beneficial times to upload content online were between the hours of 6pm-10pm. This was mainly due to the majority of people being home from work and therefore, being more likely to be using the internet. However, some participants also discussed posting between 12pm-1pm as people could also be browsing the internet during lunch-time work breaks.

This research suggested that the participants that posted most frequently online were original artists and songwriters. While the other participants would usually post to advertise upcoming performances or the release of a latest track, songwriters and original artists would also post more personal content in the aim of building personal relationships with consumers. Although the research does suggest that posting content frequently retains the interest of consumers, it also suggests that sporadic posting leads to more relevant, less random posts. Therefore, it is suggested that it would be the most beneficial to post frequent enough to keep the consumer interested, but not too often that the significance of content is diluted.

As well as being a lucrative platform to spread a message, the research suggests that social media is also an efficient way of building consumer engagement. By engaging consumers through online peer-to-peer communications, a musician can develop a deeper relationship with their audience. As suggested in Sashi's (2012) 'customer engagement cycle', through positive interactions with a brand, consumers may be more likely to develop brand loyalty and potentially become advocates. As an advocate of the brand, consumers are likely to engage in peer-to-peer communications. Therefore, this research suggests that it is essential for musicians to engage in personal interactions with their audience through social media.

Agreeing with Kramer (2009), several participants in this study suggested that millennials are a particularly valuable demographic to target when utilising a viral marketing strategy. Not only are millennials the most likely demographic to be influenced by peer-to-peer communications, but they are also the most likely to engage in them. Therefore, when attempting to initiate peer-to-peer communications, it is useful to consider which platforms are the most likely to engage millennials.

When specifically targeting millennials it was suggested by several participants to utilise Instagram. Although Facebook is beginning to consist of consumers from a more varied age group, Instagram users still mainly consist of the younger demographic. Therefore, by posting on Instagram, content is more likely to target millennials directly.

Also as Instagram is strictly pictures and videos, content is more likely to provoke an emotional reaction. As stated by Botha and Reyneke (2013), emotive content is the most likely to be shared among peers and potentially go 'viral'.

Concurring with the literature, the majority of participants put a strong emphasis on the importance of branding in the music industry. Stating that it is crucial for musicians to develop a strong image, participants also suggested that musicians must remain consistent with their branding. As image is how a brand becomes recognisable, it is important that the brand is always portrayed in a way that reflects the true intentions of the brand. By becoming known for a particular thing, this reduces potential perceived risk and increases brand trust. (Kubacki and Croft, 2004; Decrop and Derbaix, 2014; Hatch and Schultz, 2001).

As displayed in the 'VCI' model (Hatch and Schultz, 2001), it is vital that a brand's image reflects its vision and culture. As brand image is created externally by the perceptions of the consumer, if the vision, culture and image of a brand are not aligned then the brand may lose credibility. As suggested by the majority of participants, it is therefore essential, that the intended persona of a brand is portrayed consistently.

5.4. Managerial implications

Due to the constant evolutions in modern technology and online consumer behaviour, it is important for companies to keep adapting alongside those changes in order to retain competitive advantage.

Due to the low cost, efficiency and widespread capabilities of online peer-to-peer communications, it is essential for organisations to adopt a viral marketing strategy. Due to the mass amount of users on social media worldwide, these can be lucrative platforms to target consumers.

As consumers often utilise a variety of social media, it is important to share content across a variety of platforms. As Facebook is the most popular social media, this is the network that will be most likely to attract a mass amount of people. However, due to the increasing number of older demographics using Facebook, this is also likely to be the most beneficial social platform when trying to target a varied range of consumers.

The research also suggests that through certain social networks it is easier to target specific markets. As the most likely demographic to engage in peer-to-peer communications, it is particularly important to try and target millennials. Therefore, it could be beneficial to share content through social networks such as Instagram.

As a lot of business is based on the reputation that a business or organisation holds, it is therefore essential to develop a strong brand image. It is also vital that the image consistently reflects the values and culture of a brand (Hatch and Schultz, 2001). Therefore, when interacting online or engaging with consumers/peers, it is crucial to act appropriately in accordance with what the brand represents.

As the research suggests that consumers are more likely to participate in peer-to-peer communication if they are engaged with a brand, it is therefore essential to develop a relationship with consumers. By interacting on a more personal level online, organisations can utilise brand communities as a way of engaging with customers. This could be done by engaging in dialogue directly with consumers through social media platforms such as Twitter.

5.5. Limitations

As this research is focussed on viral marketing throughout the music industry, the data that was collected could be seen as too broad. Although the aim of this research was to analyse the similarities and differences between a variety of roles within the music industry, it could be argued that this research lacks depth. Therefore, a more specific approach may have been needed to lead to a more concentrated set of results.

Due to the open ended nature of semi-structured interviews, there was a lot of information given by participants that was not necessarily relevant to the research question. It therefore, may have been more appropriate to conduct structured interviews in order to gain a more specific set of results. However, as this research was aimed at a variety of musicians, all of the questions may not have been applicable to each participant.

It could also be argued that as the aim was to analyse participants from a range of roles within the music industry, that a larger sample size may have been needed. However, as the sample had started to saturate, it may have been counter-productive to have conducted any more interviews. Therefore, it could have perhaps been more time efficient to conduct focus groups or questionnaires, as this would have allowed the researcher to gather a larger collection of data within a shorter amount of time.

Although the majority of participants stated that they made money from their roles in the music industry, only a few participants considered music their full time career. This could be argued to be a limitation as several participants may be considered not to be at a 'professional' standard.

As the participants were all from separate roles within the music industry, at various stages of their career and all had different motivations, it could be argued that there were too many variables in this research and the data collected was therefore too diverse.

During the time of conducting, this research could have been considered innovative, due to not only the gap in literature, but also because of the relevance of the current uses of technology. However, due to the constant evolutions in modern technology, what may have been considered current at the time of research, may not be as relevant in future years.

5.6. Recommendations for Future Research

Although this research may have been relevant at the time of conducting, the evolving nature of technology may have implications for the future relevance of this research. As the evolution in technology could not only change the way people consume music, but also the way they behave and interact online, this could therefore, drastically change the way a musician approaches viral marketing. It would therefore be beneficial to reconsider this research again in upcoming years, as it is likely that the adaptations in technology may lead to differences in the research.

It could also be beneficial to consider this research again from a more specific perspective. As this research was aimed at discovering how musicians from a variety of roles in the music industry utilise viral marketing, a broad range of data was collected. By focussing on a singular role within the music industry, the research may give a more specific and detailed account of a particular field.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Participant Information Document

Viral marketing in the music industry: How independent musicians utilise online peer to peer communications.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before deciding, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to assess how viral marketing is utilised throughout the music industry.

By comparing musicians from various backgrounds, this research aims to evaluate how viral marketing can be used in various contexts. The findings from this study will hopefully be used to inform the approaches used to further enhance musicians' presence online.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen as part of a sample of independent musicians, coming from a variety of backgrounds in order to reflect the music industry from a broader perspective.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect the standard of care you receive in any way.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign the consent form. You will then be contacted by a researcher and invited to attend an interview, during which the aims and objectives of the project will be explained and your questions answered.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no disadvantages or risks foreseen in taking part in the study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

By taking part, you will be providing a unique insight which could potentially strengthen the results of this research, thus helping to bridge the gap in academic literature surrounding this topic. This research may also be beneficial in a practical sense, as fellow musicians may look to this research from an industry perspective.

What if something goes wrong?

If you wish to complain or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please contact:

Professor Clare Schofield

Chair of Faculty Research & Knowledge Transfer Committee

Faculty of Business & Management, University of Chester, United Kingdom, Chester CH1 4BJ

+44 (0)1244 511000 or c.schofield@chester.ac.uk

If you are harmed by taking part in this research project, there are no special compensation arrangements. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence (but not otherwise), then you may have grounds for legal action, but you may have to pay for this.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential so that only the researcher carrying out the research will have access to such information.

Participants should note that data collected from this project may be retained and published in an anonymised form. By agreeing to participate in this project, you are consenting to the retention and publication of data.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will be written up into report for a dissertation project. It is hoped that the findings may be used to improve the understanding of viral marketing in the music industry and further enhance its uses in the practical world.

Who may I contact for further information?

If you would like more information about the research before you decide whether or not you would be willing to take part, please contact:

Sam George

1215637@chester.ac.uk

Thank you for your interest in this research.

Participant Informed Consent Form

Title of Project: Viral marketing in the music industry: How independent musicians utilise online peer to peer communications.

Name of Researcher: Sam George

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my care or legal rights being affected.

☐

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

4. I agree to the interview being audio recorded

☐☐

5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Sam George

Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix 2

Interview #6 – *Lucy*

So what is your role in the music industry?

I am a songwriter and performer. I am the lead singer of an Indie band and we are just coming off tour around the UK.

How long have you been performing together?

Just over a year now, we've not been going very long. Still really young I suppose in the industry.

What are your motivations?

Well it's weird really, because I started off thinking I wouldn't really go into performing. I've always had the ambition to become a songwriter and write for other people. I've had other people perform my music. But I don't know, I've got more out of performing than I thought I would do. So I guess my motivation really is that, I want people around the world to hear my music but I also want to be the one who is performing it.

What are your aims when releasing a song?

Well there's obviously part of me which is like, it would be great if like hundreds and hundreds of people will hear this and like start singing the lyrics and stuff. Part of it again is, like, when we're writing in the band, it's usually the boys who start writing a song. The lads tend to start it off by writing the music I suppose, writing the melodies, writing the bass and stuff and then I'll get inspired by what they're playing basically and that's where I write the lyrics from. But I never really write stuff focussing on the audience, it's just that afterwards I release you know, how relatable some of the lyrics can be. Then I want everyone to hear it.

How do you promote your songs?

When release a track, we tend to promote it with a gig. So like, we'll say "Here's our new track. It's out on iTunes, Spotify, Soundcloud and what not." We'll also post it on social

media, like our Facebook and Instagram and stuff. But we also use it like, “If you want to hear this, come to this gig!”

So you use gigs to promote material, but you’re also using material to promote your gigs?

Yeah that’s true. It’s great when we release a track but it’s all about gigs now really. Because we don’t really get paid much for our recordings or anything but I suppose that’s the nature of the industry now, so everything we earn is through gigs. So we kind of use our songs to promote that. By putting our songs online for free, if people like them then hopefully they’ll come to see us.

You mentioned social media. Which social media platforms do you use?

Hahaha, we use them all! I think it’s definitely becoming more important to use a variety of different social media sites. I mean everyone is on Facebook, but Instagram is becoming really important, Twitter is great just for communicating with fans as well. I think especially for recordings artists it’s vital to be on stuff like Soundcloud and Spotify too. The internet is a very busy place so you’ve just got to get your stuff on everything. That’s what everyone else is doing.

Do you share other people’s content on social media?

We do personally, on our private page but the only time we’ve really done it on the band page is when we’re collaborating with someone. For example we’re playing a gig on the 16th of December, which is kind of like an artsy collaborative night. So during the night there’s going to be us and another band playing, and what we’re going to do is, we’ve actually going to swap band members half way through. Sort of swap around, and that will be the changeover between bands if that makes sense. So we’ve promoted people like doing that in the past, but it’s only really a way of promoting ourselves. Because we’re basically saying “Hi, here’s our friends, did you know we’re going to be playing with them?”

What are the benefits of sharing other people's music?

It's a networking thing really. You need to get a community going with other musicians.

Because you think by sharing other people's music and helping people, you are leaving the door open for yourself. I just think it's really important to support other people because how else are going to expect have friends support you if you're not willing to just share a post of someone's or just say check out this band. I just don't think it takes a lot of effort to do it and it can mean a lot. And it can actually bring people new followers.

Is your music targeted towards any particular audience?

I don't like to say an age bracket because that can differ. So I would say we aim at people who are interested in sort of vintage styles, like décor and stuff you know. But also, people that, I don't know... Cause we've got kind of a quirky aesthetic, but we don't really have a band aesthetic if that makes sense. So anyone who's ever complimented us they always say "Oh you don't really look like a band, you're not in all black" or whatever. So I guess, perhaps our audience target, is people who like to be themselves.

If we just said, we're suitable for his demographic, it wouldn't really make sense. Because we have a lot of influence in our sound from like the 70s and 80s. So it wouldn't make sense to exclude people from the older demographic that have grown up with this kind of music.

Are there any particular channels you can use to target people of this particular behaviour?

I suppose Instagram. I mean we use all of the different social media sites. Probably Facebook because everyone is on Facebook and we actually get quite a range of demographics sharing our stuff on there. People think it's just for the kids but it's not just

younger people though. Recently we've had quite a lot of the older generation sharing our posts! But I suppose that might be to do with the growing number of the older people going online nowadays. I mean all of our grandparents are on Facebook now; they're probably on it more than we are. And they share all of our videos on their friend's 'walls' or whatever, it's a proper little community."

What are the benefits of marketing online compared to more traditional methods of marketing?

Well I guess because, it doesn't matter the demographic, virtually everyone is on the internet now. Even the band's moms. We have a joke about how our mums are sharing the posts because they're obsessed with Facebook. They're on Facebook more than us. So that is just it, if we ever have anyone come over to us, they ask where they can download a song, that's what they say. They're not saying have you got a CD, they're saying where can I download it from on the internet so... that's how the industry has changed.

Is there any particular time of day to post on social media?

Yeah we actually aim to post like early evening. Later afternoon/early evening. We won't post stuff before 12 really. Unless we're promoting the gig we're playing on that night. SO if we're playing a gig that day, it doesn't matter if we post at like 11am. But just because we noticed that most people are on the internet when they've got home after work or what not. I think it's important to make sure you are not posting too late either, particularly on weekends or a Friday night. You want to catch people when they've got home from work but also before they've gone out to the pub or whatever.

Do you ever make events for gigs on Facebook?

Yeah, we make an event on Facebook for every gig we play. Apart from if someone else is already promoting the gig. If somebody has already made an event on Facebook there is no point, as people might not even click attend if it's a duplicate event anyway.

Is there anything else you post on social media?

Yeah on Twitter we're trying to be more aware of our band character. Cause obviously with 5 people, there's often times when one of us will suggest to post something and one of us will say "I don't want that post!" So we're trying to develop this sort of persona of what the band is as a whole. So we've posted some funny videos on Instagram as well. Of us messing around at rehearsals or whatever. So posting stuff like that is sort of aimed at developing some sort of informal, friendly, sort of persona that people can sort of relate to. So, our fans can sort of connect with the character. Be friendly. You know not too much though, we do still want to keep an image of a serious band so we don't want to make it too jokey.

Is branding important in the music industry?

Yeah definitely. I think that's really important. It all comes down to accessibility for the fans and people who are listening at the end of the day. If they've got something that's more than just a band, that they can get involved in and follow, you know, obsess over. There's more to it than just the music. It's the character, it's the story. It's a style, you know. It's even colours, if there's a colour scheme to follow. I think that's great. You know, that helps in merchandise and promotion and everything. I feel that branding has played a massive role for us. I mean, you have to get known for a particular thing, that's how you place yourself in the industry. Once we established ourselves as an Indie band, it was much easier

to find the right kind of gigs. By placing yourself in a particular scene, it becomes easier to target an audience.